

# **Planning Collaboration Initiative Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration**

## **Conference Call Summary for March 5, 2003 Topic: STIP Approval and Amendments**

The first round of conference calls for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Collaboration Initiative (PCI) began on March 5, 2003 with a discussion about STIP Approval and Amendments. The first of 15 conference calls to discuss the drafting of a National Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between FHWA and FTA was held from 3:00 to 4:15 PM. Robin Mayhew from FHWA Headquarters and Vince Valdes from FTA Headquarters led the discussion. Other members of the PCI Team who participated in the conference call include: Jesse Balleza from FTA, and Larry Dwyer and Mike Leary from FHWA. Volpe Center participants included Jeff Bryan, Cassandra Callaway, and Kate Fichter.

Representatives from the following field offices participated in this first call:

- |                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| ◆ FTA Region 1             | ◆ FHWA Indiana Division      |
| ◆ FTA Region 2             | ◆ FHWA Iowa Division         |
| ◆ FTA Region 3             | ◆ FHWA Kansas Division       |
| ◆ FTA Region 4             | ◆ FHWA Michigan Division     |
| ◆ FTA Region 5             | ◆ FHWA Minnesota Division    |
| ◆ FTA Region 7             | ◆ FHWA Mississippi Division  |
| ◆ FTA Region 8             | ◆ FHWA Nebraska Division     |
| ◆ FTA Region 9             | ◆ FHWA New Jersey Division   |
| ◆ FTA Region 10            | ◆ FHWA Oregon Division       |
| ◆ FHWA Alaska Division     | ◆ FHWA Pennsylvania Division |
| ◆ FHWA California Division | ◆ Chicago Metro Office       |
| ◆ FHWA Florida Division    | ◆ Los Angeles Metro Office   |

Conference call participants expressed comments about PCI in general, and about the timely approval of STIPs and STIP Amendments process, in particular. This summary documents these discussions. In conclusion, this summary provides (1) recommendations made during the conference call to the PCI Team and (2) a description of other issues that arose during the conversation and should be addressed, but were not immediately relevant to the discussion on STIP Approval and Amendments (Parking Lot/Bus Stop Issues).

### **OVERALL COMMENTS ABOUT THE PCI**

- Participants stated that they would like the National MOU to serve as a framework for better working relationships, but the National MOU needs to be flexible. Relationships at the local level need to be tailored because there are differences among the states and regions (e.g. geographic, political structures, understanding of planning processes and products, etc.).

- Participants voiced an overwhelming preference for teleconferences, as opposed to videoconferences, for the PCI conference calls.
- This year's FHWA-FTA Planners' Seminar, which is scheduled for August 12 – 15, 2003 in Alexandria, Virginia, will provide an opportunity to further discuss PCI and the draft national MOU, among other topics of interest to FHWA and FTA planners.

## **TIMELY STIP APPROVAL AND AMENDMENTS**

The conference call participants raised the topic of timeliness of STIP Approval and Amendments throughout the conference call. Three primary issues were discussed:

- A. Physical Separation of Offices
- B. Coordination and Communication among Partners
- C. Meaningful Involvement by Agencies

### A. Physical Separation of Offices

The geographic separation of some FHWA and FTA offices is an obstacle to timely signatures of documents. Sending documents back and forth between offices consumes time. Solutions to overcome this issue include:

1. Electronic mail is used extensively between FHWA and FTA to discuss and agree on the content of STIPs and STIP Amendments. Approval is then coordinated via Fed Ex of final documents.
2. FTA Regions 2, 7, and 9 and Michigan FHWA Division Office discussed the development and implementation of electronic database systems for the STIP process that can be password protected. An important feature of the systems is that they store electronic signatures.

The following recommendations were made to be considered in the drafting of the National MOU:

- Provide information about the Federal requirements regarding electronic signatures.
- Establish protocols for the use of new technologies and procedures.

### B. Coordination and Communication among Partners

Lack of coordination and communication delays signatures because signatories do not know what and when they can expect documents for review and approval. Participants agreed that strong working relationships among regional partners help improve coordination and communication in some regions. Solutions to overcome poor communication and coordination include:

1. Early and often involvement and communication of STIP Approvals and Amendments are required.
2. Negotiated timeframes for reviews and signatures of documents improve coordination between agencies.
3. Limit the number of STIP Amendments, for example accept STIP Amendments once a month. Regional partners can better manage workloads with advanced notice of how often STIP Amendments will be required.

The following recommendations were made to the PCI Team for drafting the National MOU:

- Establish parameters for review and signature schedules.

- Include an alternative dispute resolution system to provide procedures to prevent or overcome delays in acquiring signatures (i.e. reach an agreement).

### C. Meaningful Involvement of Agencies

It is necessary to balance expedient review and signature of documents with meaningful involvement of agencies. While some conference call participants advocated for delegation of authority for one agency to sign on behalf of both agencies, other participants voiced concern that the quality of a review would be sacrificed for quick approval of documents. In addition, those in opposition are skeptical that an Administration will be excluded from a process that is intended to have participation from both Administrations.

While field office staff appear to be divided over this issue, some regions have developed solutions for delegating authority and ensuring meaningful involvement of agencies, including:

1. Under an MOU in Texas, if a STIP Amendment relates to only one transportation mode, FWHA and FTA agree to allow the Administration to which the modal issues in the Amendment relate, to sign the STIP Amendment. Agencies in California operate similarly with the exception of Amendments that relate to Flexible Funds and conformity.
2. In many cases, minor STIP Amendments require only one Administration signature.

The following recommendations were provided to be considered in the drafting of the National MOU:

- Set criteria and develop guidance for delegation of signature that allows flexibility for field offices to delegate authority if it is deemed non-detrimental to the STIP Approval and Amendment processes.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following list restates the recommendations provided in this summary report that relate to timely STIP Approval and Amendments:

- Provide information about the Federal requirements regarding electronic signatures.
- Establish protocols for the use of new technologies and procedures.
- Establish parameters for review and signature schedules.
- Include an alternative dispute resolution system to provide procedures to prevent or overcome delays in acquiring signatures (i.e. reach an agreement).
- Set criteria and develop guidance for delegation of signature that allows flexibility for field offices to delegate authority if it is deemed non-detrimental to the STIP Approval and Amendment processes.

## **PARKING LOT/BUS STOP ISSUES**

The following issues arose during the conference call and should be addressed, but were not immediately relevant to the discussion on STIP Approval and Amendments:

- Fiscal constraint – participants want to discuss methods for determining fiscal constraint.
- Criteria for STIP Amendments – participants want Headquarters to clarify what constitutes an Administrative Amendment.